

"Animal Tragic" Islam And The Treatment Of Animals

Source: *Invitation To Islam* Newsletter, vol.1 issue.6, July 1999

Chained up bears in Russian circuses. A terrified fox running from the blood hounds. The Spanish bull being tormented in the arena with darts and knives. Elephant graveyards littered across India and Africa, courtesy of ivory hunters. Thousands of rare animals vanishing due to the deforestation of Central and Southern America. All these are examples of the tragic state of the creatures which live alongside us on this planet.

Indeed, to be an animal in today's world is not an easy life. Injustice against animals occurs in all of today's societies. Living in the West, we hear many tales of cruelty towards animals in the 'third' world. The cruel cock fighting of South East Asia, the 'barbaric' animal delicacies of the Orient and the international smuggling of rare animals, are just some of the tales we hear. However, people in the West seem to forget that cruelty also goes on under their own noses.

Every year the cosmetics industry kills millions of animals for testing, just to appease the vain desires of people. Cattle and livestock are transported between the 'civilised' nations of Europe in the most horrendous conditions. And animals are brought to the verge of extinction just so that people can revel in the latest trends of jewellery and fashion. Indeed, to be an animal in today's world is not as easy life!

So what is the solution to this cruelty? Do we all join the RSPCA and WWF?¹ Do we jump onto the bandwagon with the crazy animal rights groups and start bombing campaigns? No, clearly not, as such measures have eased the cruelty to animals very little. So what do we do? The answer is simple, and has been available to the people of the world for the past 1400 years. It is none other than Islam.

Islam and Animals – The Americans send a monkey into space and the Russians a dog. TV programmes about injured animals are aired daily. Cruelty to pets results in massive fines and imprisonment. Such actions by the non-Muslims are seen as liberating forces which have only come into existence this century. However, unknown to many, Islam endorsed this kindness to animals 1400 years earlier. It is Islam which first taught the world about compassion and Mercy to animals. The Qur'an and the Sunnah (way) of the Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam), give us guidance in all affairs. By worshipping Allaah through these sources, the treatment of animals is exemplified more than any other way.

Islam teaches us that the creatures of the earth are from the signs of Allaah, by which we can recognise His Greatness. They are all here for a specific purpose which Allaah has ordained for them. From the tiniest ant to the largest Blue Whale, each animal on this earth provides a service by which life carries on uninterrupted. As Muslims, we see these creatures as an opportunity to reflect and ponder about the perfect artistry of Allaah. An example are the birds in the sky as Allaah says:

¹ RSPCA – Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. WWF - World Wide Fund for nature

"Do they not observe the birds above them, spreading out their wings and folding them in? None upholds them except the Most Merciful. Indeed He is the All-Seer of everything." [Surah al-Mulk (67):19]

These creatures offer us so much by way of their services. They are our food, our clothing, our livelihoods and our transportation across the land. All this they do for us at no cost or charge. As Muslims we have to therefore be grateful to Allaah for this magnificent blessing, as He says:

"Thus We have made them (animals) subject to you that you may be grateful." [Surah Al-Hajj (22):36]

The gratitude to Allaah comes in the form of kindness towards these animals. Such is the mercy of Islam, that it produces this kindness through the expectation of Allaah's reward, as the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said:

"....there is a reward for kindness to every living thing" ²

In this way Muslims see kind treatment of animals as a religious deed to please Allaah. To mistreat animals is thus disobedience to Allaah – something which we will be held accountable for, as the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) demonstrated when he said:

"A woman (from the previous nations) was tormented because of a cat which she had confined and staved till it died. She did not allow it to eat or drink while it was confined, nor did she set it free so that it may eat the insects of the earth. As a result of her wickedness she was condemned to Hell." ³

People abuse and torture animals because they think that no one will hold them accountable. Once people accept that Allaah will hold us all to account, can such cruelty stop. By studying the beliefs and practising the injunctions of Islam, cruelty to animals can truly stop. Looking at the example of the Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) we can see exactly how animals should be treated. Thus, from the actions and saying of this amazing man, can so much be learned in this oppressive and unjust world.

The way of Muhammad (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) – Once, during the early part of the day, the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) passed by a withered camel kneeling down near the gate of the mosque. At the end of the day he passed by the mosque again only to see the camel in the same state as before. When the owner of the camel was looked for but could not be found, he (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said to the people:

"Fear Allaah regarding these dumb animals and ride them with care and feed them with care." ⁴

The last Messenger to humanity also said:

"Ride these animals peacefully, and when you are not in need of them keep them peacefully, and do not take them as chairs." ⁵

² Reported by Muslim – Eng. Trans Vol.4, Pp.1215-6, No.5577

³ Reported by Muslim – Eng. Trans Vol.4, p.1381, No.6348

⁴ Authentic – Reported by Ahmed and Abu Dawud

⁵ Authentic – Reported by Ahmed

calltoislam.

The lot of the animal in light of these sayings is exonerated beyond anything that the liberation movements of the West have produced. This is because the sayings of this man are not from his own desire, rather:

"....it is (only) the revelation with which he is inspired"
[Surah An-Najm 53:4]

The Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said:

"Beware of taking the backs of your animals as pulpits, for indeed Allaah, the Most High, has subjugated them for you to carry you to a land with great difficulty...."⁶

Look at the wisdom of these words O' reader. Is this not an appreciation of the creatures which inhabit our planet? Whilst the rest of the world was steeped in savagery, here was this amazing man, 1400 years ago, improving the situation for every being on earth. Once, while entering an enclosure, the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) saw a camel. When the camel saw the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) it began to cry. So the Prophet went to it, wiped its back around its hump and rubbed it until it calmed down. Then addressing the owner of the camel, he (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said:

"Will you not fear Allaah in regards to these animals which Allaah has placed under your control? For indeed it (the camel) has complained to me that you keep it hungry and fatigued."⁷

The leader of a nation and a man to be followed by millions, is seen here comforting a creature which cannot even talk. Such behaviour has made the Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) the most influential man ever to exist. One does not hear of Confucious, Caeser, Napoleon, Hitler or any other famous leader ever expressing such mercy and compassion towards the creation. Even today, when leaders broadcast their own virtues to gain support, we find that they cannot even stop the cruelty which goes on in their countries. The widespread abuse of riding beasts (camels, elephants, horses, mules etc.) in circuses is one such example. The case of Mary Chipperfield, a circus trainer who was caught on camera beating elephants – only for her to be given them back – shows us how much the people truly need Islam.

The killing of animals for the sake of sport and fun is something totally outlawed by the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) and Islam. He (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said:

"Do not take any living thing as a target."⁸

In fact, such is the severity of this, that Ibn Umar (a companion of the Prophet) said: "Indeed the Messenger of Allaah cursed the one who made a living thing a target."⁹

Thus, big game safaris, bull fighting and fox hunting are all acts which were condemned by Islam even before they were invented by the Europeans. If pain has to be inflicted, such as for identifying purposes, then the Prophet (Sallallahu

⁶ Authentic – Reported by Baihaqee

⁷ Authentic – Reported by Ibn Asakir

⁸ Reported by Muslim – Eng. Trans Vol.3, p1079, No.4813

⁹ Reported by Muslim – Eng. Trans Vol.3, p1079, No.4816

'alaihi wa sallam) "....Prohibited striking animals in their faces or branding them on their faces." ¹⁰

The international smuggling of rare tropical birds and the theft of their eggs is something well highlighted. The motive to make profit from the suffering of some of the most beautiful creatures on earth, is a good reason for many. With Islam however, such a reason is not valid. Once the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) was on a journey with his companions. Some of his companions saw a nest with a bird and its two chicks. They took the chicks from the nest which made the bird swivel around in anxiety. When the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) saw this he said:

"Who has caused distress to her regarding her children?
Return her children to her". ¹¹

Kindness is even extended to those animals which Islam normally bars participation with, such as dogs. ¹² The Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) informed us about a man from the previous nations who had seen a thirsty dog panting and eating mud. The man climbed into a well, filled his shoe with water and gave it to the dog. Because of this "....Allaah thanked and forgave him." ¹³

The Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) also said:

"Allaah forgave a prostitute (from the Israelites) who tied her shoe to her scarf and drew out some water (from a well) for a dog which she saw dying of thirst....." ¹⁴

The kind treatment of animals is topped up by the practical help which Islam advises with. The Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said:

"Any Muslim who plants a tree gains the reward of giving in charity. What is eaten from it is charity, what is stolen from it, what the animals eat and what the birds eat is all charity...." ¹⁵

Not only do these words encourage us to preserve the environment, but they also help us to provide a welcome sustenance to the animals around us. Developing from this, the Muslim will increase obedience to Allaah by leaving out bread and biscuits for the birds that visit the garden, or nuts for the squirrels who rummage around. Having heard these narrations about the last Messenger, only the unjust would say that Islam does not truly emancipate animals.

Extremes – Cruelty to animals is one extreme regarding the beasts of the earth. On the other side of the spectrum we find that the lot of the animal is increased so much, that it has even superseded that of humanity. In today's world people love and honour animals so much that they literally worship them! What could be more typical of this than the religion of Hinduism. Cows, monkeys, snakes, elephants and rats are among the many animals worshipped by Hindus. By going to this extreme of worshipping and loving animals, the lives of humans are usually forgotten and put in danger.

¹⁰ Reported by Muslim – Eng. Trans Vol.3, p1163, No.5281

¹¹ Authentic – Reported by Hakim

¹² hunting dogs (for meat – not foxes!), sheep dogs and guard dogs are the only kind of dogs allowed by Islam

¹³ Reported by Muslim – Eng. Trans Vol.4, Pp.1215-6, No.5577

¹⁴ Reported by Muslim – Eng. Trans Vol.4, p1216, No.5579

¹⁵ Reported by Muslim – Eng. Trans Vol.3, p818, No.3764

A perfect example is the huge outbreak of plague in Calcutta, India, a few years ago. According to Hindu mythology, Ganesh the elephant headed deity, who is called upon to remove obstacles, used to ride upon a rat! Because of this the rat is considered sacred and thus the city could not be sectioned off. Such insane polytheistic behaviour resulted in this plague spreading and killing many people. Such is the deification of the rat in Hinduism, that in India special temples are dedicated for rats. In these temples Hindus live and eat with rats. Once the rats finish drinking milk provided for them, that which is left over is drunk by Hindus who consider the milk to have been blessed!!

Other religions such as Jainism ¹⁶ have gone to such extremes, that we find that their religious monks and nuns constantly wear mouth veils lest they should swallow even a fly by accident!

The worship of animals is not just confined to organised religion. In the West, many pet owners are also guilty of this. The extent to which people love their pets has escalated beyond control. Every year millions are spent on pampering pets. If all the money from the beauty pageants for cats and dogs was sent to the starving millions around the world, so much human life could be saved. But no... the eccentric vices of the West deem that animal life is far precious than human life.

With Islam, humans undoubtedly come first. The destruction of human life for the sake of animals is epitomised by the animal rights groups who are so fervent in the West. Activities of groups such as the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) clearly show how human life is so undervalued. By vandalising and destroying laboratories, such groups believe that they are liberating the poor animals who are tested therein.¹⁷ However the human cost of such actions is ignored. By testing animals for medical research, remedies for cancer, Alzheimer's, and many other degenerative illnesses are being developed. Such testing is very beneficial for humanity and has brought relief to many through the new drugs developed. Thus, in destroying incubators, computers and other valuable equipment, more people are kept in pain than animals. Letter bombs, car bombs, assassinations and throwing acid at scientists, are just some of the horrors which these terrorists have unleashed upon society. Every year innocent people get killed because of the love which these lunatics have for animals. Such people have clearly gone to extremes with the creatures of the earth.

Slaughter – One of the criticisms levelled at Islam by demented animal rights activists, is that it encourages the wide scale slaughter of animals. Every year after the annual Hajj (pilgrimage) Muslims worldwide sacrifice an animal for the pleasure of Allaah. Not only is this a religious duty benefiting the doer, but it also helps many starving people around the world, to whom the meat is sent to. This however, is blurred from the minds of the insane. In countries such as Britain and France, protests against this are vigorous. In France such protests have been intensified with the support of people like Bridgett Bardot, the famous 'sex-kitten' of French cinema.¹⁸ If only these people were to examine the way of the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam), would they realise that even in the slaughter of animals Islam has regulated compassion.

¹⁶ Jainism – An ancient Indian religion based upon extreme forms of sympathy and compassion to all living beings

¹⁷ These animals are often bred in captivity, not knowing any existence outside a cage. By removing them from such surroundings, more damage is caused. An example is the release of 2000 minks from a mink farm last year in the UK by activists. Starving and desperate, the minks turned from harmless creatures into ferocious beasts rampaging the English countryside on the lookout for food - even if it was human!

¹⁸ Bardot, now an old Moggy (!), is known for her obsessive campaigning for animal rights

The Islamic method of slaughtering is one which embodies true mercy. To have mercy whilst slaughtering will bring mercy from Allaah, as the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said:

"Whosoever has mercy, even if he is slaughtering a sparrow, Allaah will have mercy upon him on the day of resurrection." ¹⁹

Thus, the method of slaughtering with a knife (at the wind pipe) is far painless than the electric shocks or crushing bows to the head which are administered in the West. The Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said:

"Allaah has enjoined goodness to everything.. when you slaughter, slaughter in a good way. Let every one of you sharpen his knife and let the slaughtered animal die comfortably." ²⁰

By using a sharp knife to slaughter, the pain is minimised and the animal dies very quickly. Such is the mercy of Islam, that it even forbids that a knife be sharpened in front of the slaughtered animal, lest it would feel terror and anxiety. Once the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) passed by a man who had his foot on the neck of a sheep. Whilst he was sharpening his blade, the sheep was looking towards it. The Prophet of Mercy (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said to him:

"Do you intend to give it two deaths? Why did you not sharpen your knife before you laid it on the ground?" ²¹

This compassionate behaviour of the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) was understood and implemented in the best way by his noble companions. Thus, we find that Umar, the second righteous caliph of Islam, once hit a man with a stick because he sharpened his blade in front of a sheep. Another time, Umar saw a man dragging a sheep to slaughter it. Umar hit him with a stick ²² and said: "Drive it – may your mother be bereaved of you – to its death in a nice way." ²³

After reading this, who can say that Islam encourages wide scale slaughter? Surely those who criticise Islam after knowing how merciful it is towards animals, do so from desire. Animals have been created for our use and provision; yet such is the beauty of Islam, that it has set a standard for use and provision which is truly humane. There is no other way which is so balanced in its treatment of the animals of the earth.

From cruelty to craziness, the extremes regarding animals are astounding. These extremes show how ignorant people are of their purpose in life. Once people realise that Allaah deserves to be worshipped alone, will everything else fall into place. Our actions on this earth stem from whether or not we worship Allaah correctly. Those who worship Allaah correctly are those who treat the animals of the earth correctly. Those who worship other than Allaah, are those who go to extremes with animals.

¹⁹ Authentic – Reported by Baihaqee

²⁰ Reported by Muslim – Eng. Trans Vol.3, p1078, No.4810

²¹ Authentic – Reported by Hakim

²² Compare Umar's hitting in order to defend animals, with the terrorism which occurs today! As Muslims this shows how perfect the understanding of the Companions is.

²³ Authentic – both incidents reported by Baihaqee

calltoislam.

"The world is beautiful and green and Allaah - be He exalted – has made you governors over it to see how you will act" ²⁴ said Muhammad the last Messenger of Allaah. By worshipping Allaah as guided by Islam, we can act correctly with the animals, the plants and all that is in the beautiful and green world of ours.

May Allaah help us to show compassion to all the creatures which He has created.
Ameen

²⁴ Reported by Muslim – Eng. Trans Vol.4, p1432, No.6606